

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RANGOO 02295 031124Z

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR, ELAB, BM

SUBJ: FORMATION OF PEASANTS' ORGANIZATION

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE FIRST PEASANTS' ORGANIZATION CONFERENCE WAS HELD IN RANGOON DURING THE PAST WEEK. THIS ORGANIZATION IS TO REPLCE THE PEASANTS' COUNCIL AS THE INSTITUTION TO REPRESENT THE FARMERS OF BURMA. THERE IS LITTLE THAT IS DIFFERENT IN THE NEW ORGANIZATION AND MUCH THAT IS THE SAME AS THE BODY IT IS INTENDED TO REPLACE, E.G. THE STRUCTURE, THE LEADERS, THE GOALS, AND EVEN THE SPEECHES ALL REMAIN THE SAME AS THEY WERE UNDER THE PEASANTS' COUNCIL. DESPITE THE HEAVY PUBLICITY WHICH ACCOMPANIED THE MEETING, IT APPEARS THAT THE FORMATION OF THIS ORGANIZATION WILL HAVE LITTLE NEW IMPACT ON THE GUB'S AGRICULTURAL POLICY OR ON THE DAILY LIVES OF BURMA'S AGRICULTURAL WORKERS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE FIRST PEASANTS' ASIAYONE (ORGANIZATION) CONFERENCE TOOK PLACE FROM JULY 25 TO AUGUST 1. THE CONFERENCE, WHICH HAS VIRTUALLY MONOPOLIZED SPACE IN THE STATE-CONTROLLED PRESS, WAS INTENDED TO INAUGURATE AND ORGANIZE A NEW FARMERS' INSTITUTION TO SUCCEED THE PEASANTS' COUNCIL WHICH HAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 RANGOO 02295 031124Z

UNTIL NOW BEEN THE OFFICIAL BODY TO REPRESENT AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN BURMA.

2. STATEMENTS AT THE CONFERENCE AND PRESS EDITORIALS CLAIM THE NEW PEASANTS' ORGANIZATION IS MUCH MORE THAN A MERE CHANGE IN NAME FOR THE PEASANTS' COUNCIL, BUT IN STRUCTURE, OFFICERS AND BASIC PHILOSOPHY IT SEEMS LITTLE

MORE THAN THAT. FOR EXAMPLE, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE OLD PEASANTS' COUNCIL WAS ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NEW PEASANTS' ORGANIZATION, AND OTHER MAJOR OFFICERS ARE ALSO CARRY OVERS. MUCH THE SAME AS THE PEASANTS' COUNCIL, THE NEW ORGANIZATION IS HEADED BY A 300-MEMBER CENTRAL LEADING BODY CHOSEN FROM AMONG THE 1,115 DELEGATES SELECTED TO ATTEND THE OPENING CONFERENCE. THIS BODY IN TURN ELECTS FROM ITS MEMBERS A 35-MEMBER CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO OVERSEE THE DAY-TO-DAY ROUTINE OF THE ORGANIZATION. WHILE SOME MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL BODY AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MAY BE GENUINE PEASANTS, THERE IS A HEAVY SPRINKLING OF TOP BURMA SOCIALIST PROGRAM PARTY LEADERS AND HIGH LEVEL BUREAUCRATS, SUCH AS THE MINISTER AND DEPUTY MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FORESTS AND THE MANAGING DIRECTORS OF THE AGRICULTURAL CORPORATION AND LIVESTOCK CORPORATION, WHO HARDLY QUALIFY AS PEASANTS.

3. IN ADDITION TO ELECTING THE GOVERNING BODIES, THE CONFERENCE ALSO APPROVED THE ORGANIZATIONAL RULES, FEES, DUTIES AND FUTURE TASKS OF THE NEW ORGANIZATION. SPEECHES AT THE CONFERENCE, INCLUDING AN OPENING DAY TALK BY PRESIDENT NE WIN, CONTAINED THE VERY FAMILIAR PHRASES OF BURMESE SOCIALIST RHETORIC AND THE OFT-STATED PLEAS FOR PEASANTS TO STRIVE HARDER AND PRODUCE MORE TO MEET THE GOVERNMENT'S PRODUCTION GOALS. THIS IS NO NEW DEPARTURE AS PAST MEETINGS

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PAGE 03 RANGOO 02295 031124Z

OF THE PEASANTS' COUNCIL WERE ALWAYS OCCASSIONS FOR SUCH STATEMENTS.

4. IN EFFECT, AND DESPITE THE OFFICIAL STATEMENTS, THERE WAS ONLY A CHANGE IN NAME. THE REASON FOR THE CHANGE WAS NEVER MADE CLEAR OTHER THAN TO STATE THAT AS THE BSPP MOVES FROM A "CADRE PARTY" TO A "PEOPLE'S PARTY," THE VARIOUS LOWER ORGANIZATIONS MUST ALSO EVOLVE WITH IT. THE NEW ORGANIZATION SEEMS MORE CLOSELY TIED TO THE BSPP THAN WAS THE CASE WITH THE PEASANTS' COUNCIL, BUT THIS IS HARDLY A MAJOR CHANGE. ACCORDING TO SEVERAL SOURCES, THE REAL REASON FOR THE CHANGE IN NAME IS THAT THE GUB IS ATTEMPTING TO DO AWAY WITH THE WORD "COUNCIL" FROM ALL LOWER BODIES, RESERVING THE USE OF THAT WORD ONLY FOR THE COUNCIL OF STATE AND THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. IN ADDITION, THE GUB HAS IN THE PAST LAUNCHED LARGE PUBLICITY CAMPAIGNS ABOUT SIMILAR COSMETIC CHANGES IN AN APPARENT EFFORT TO INSTILL A SENSE OF MOTION INTO AN OTHERWISE STAGNATING SITUATION.

5. THIS CONFERENCE WILL BE FOLLOWED SHORTLY BY A SECOND CONFERENCE TO CHANGE THE PRESENT WORKERS' COUNCIL INTO A WORKERS' ORGANIZATION, PERHAPS FOR THE SAME REASONS. THE

WORKERS' CONFERENCE IS ALREADY RECEIVING A HEAVY PUBLICITY
BUILD-UP.

6. A KNOWLEDGEABLE BURMESE COMMENTING ON THE PUBLICITY WHICH
HAS ACCOMPANIED THIS CONFERENCE AND THE UPCOMING WORKERS'
ORGANIZATION CONFERENCE MADE THE CYNICAL BUT PERHAPS ACCURATE
OBSERVATION THAT "THE MORE THE GOVERNMENT PUBLISHES ABOUT A
MEETING THE LESS IT MEANS IN TERMS OF OUR DAILY LIVES. IT
IS THE MEETINGS WE DON'T HEAR ABOUT THAT REALLY COUNT IN
BURMA."
BARTLEY

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